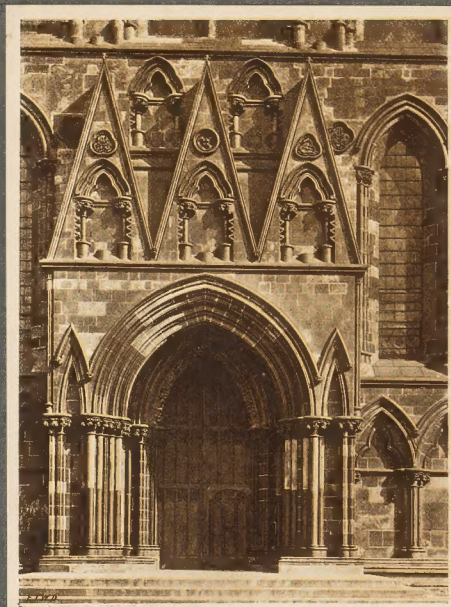


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No. 3.—YORK

# Portfolio OF English Cathedrals



With Historical and  
Architectural Notes  
By ARNOLD FAIRBAIRNS

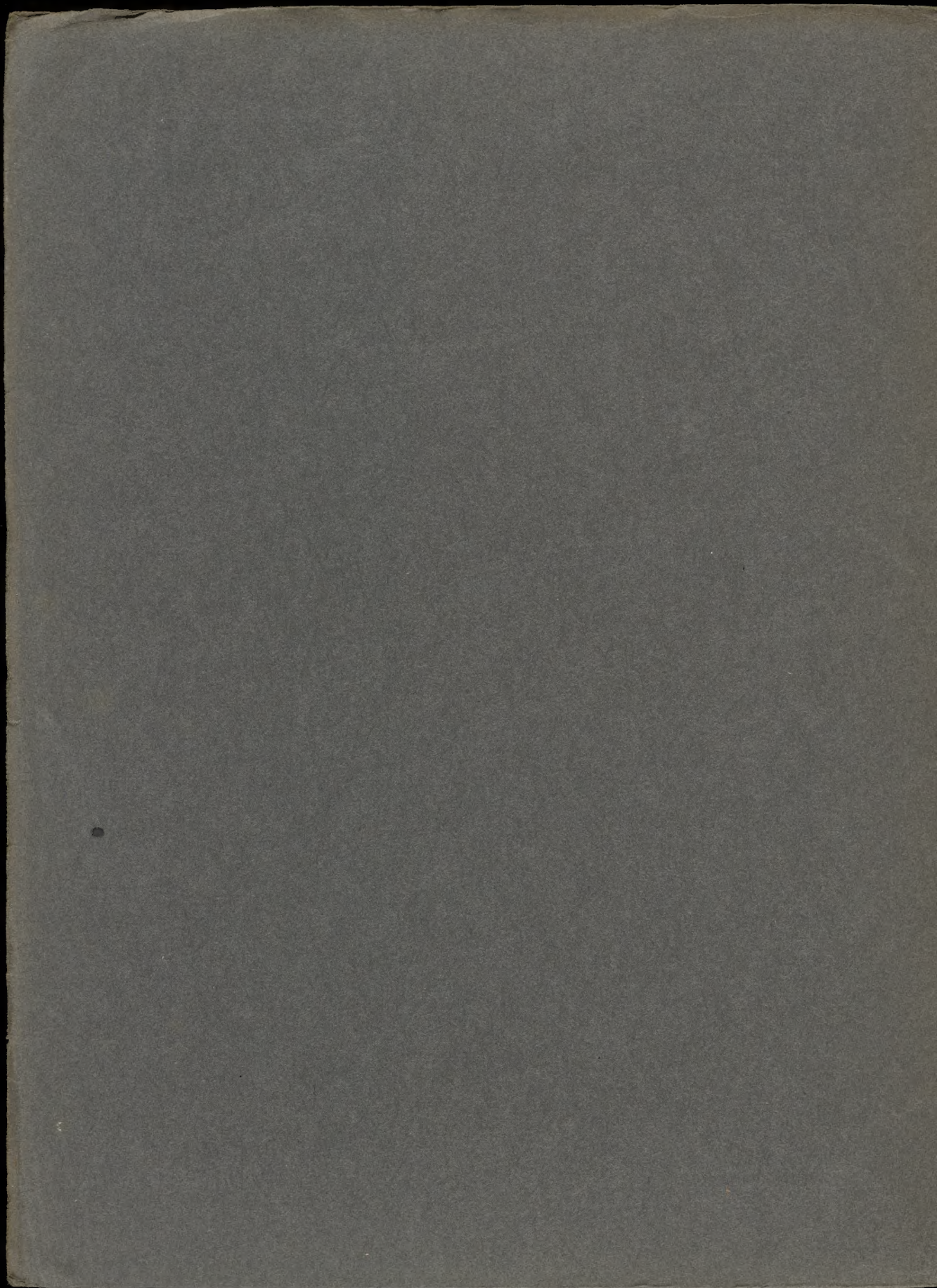


## YORK

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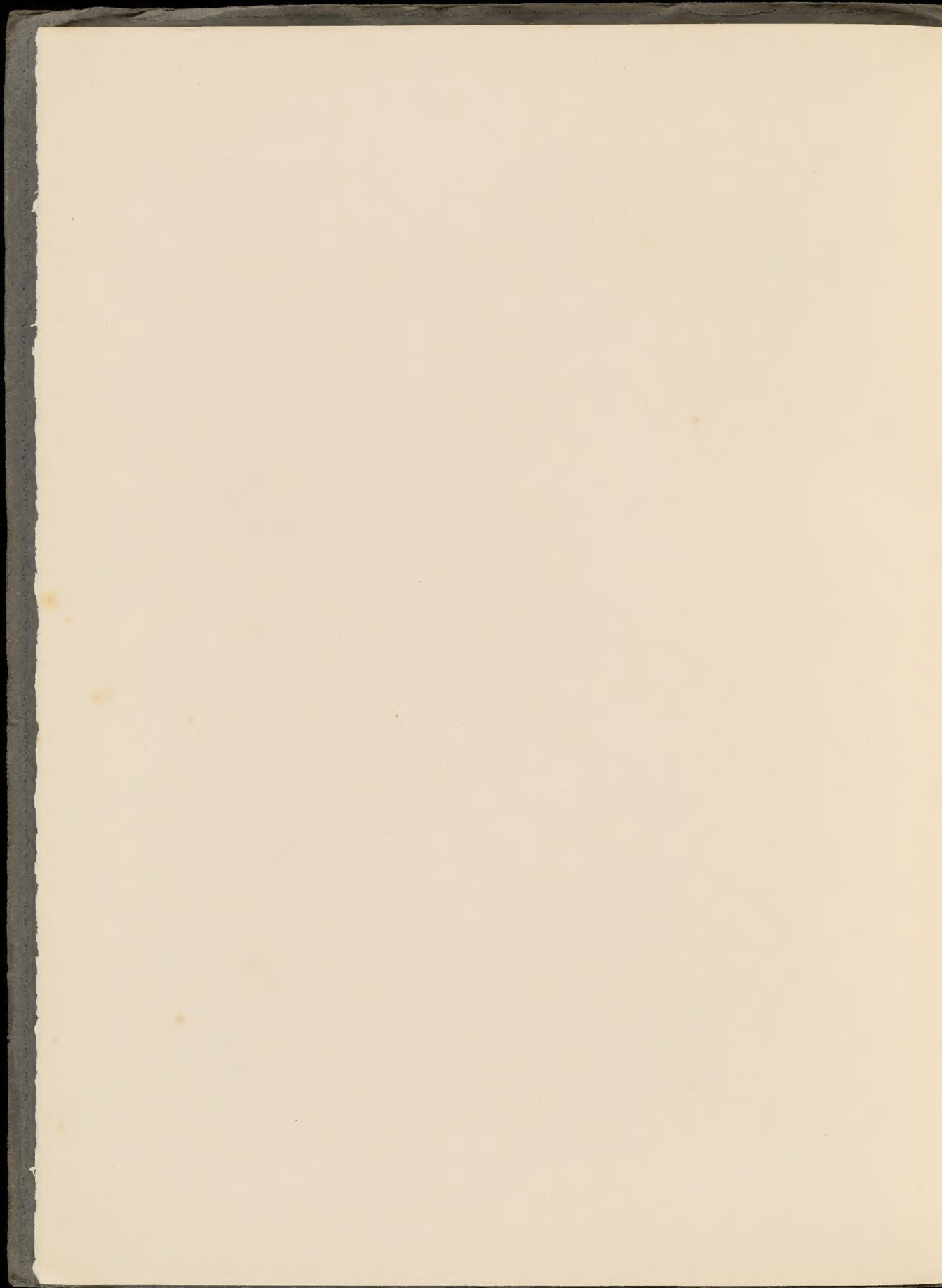








YORK CATHEDRAL



## INTRODUCTION



It is almost impossible to think of York without at once recalling the Roman occupation of Britain, for the northern city was not only their chief station in these islands but held a position of unique importance in the Empire. The traditions of the Christian church, however, do not go further back than the seventh century, with the exception of one event. It is recorded that in 314 a bishop of York was present at the Council of Arles. This is the only glimpse we get of the early Christian bishopric, the next event recorded being the baptism of Edwin, King of Northumbria, in 627, by Paulinus. For this solemn ceremony a temporary wooden church was erected, but was immediately replaced by a more solid structure. Fire destroyed this building a hundred years later, and the church which took its place shared a similar fate in 1069. Thomas, the first Norman bishop, found all in ruins, so built a simple church for his immediate needs. Following the fashion of his time Roger began to enlarge in the twelfth century, building a choir which showed the influence of the contemporary work at Canterbury and Durham. But in 1230 a great period of building began which ended in the entire reconstruction of the church as it is to-day, leaving only a few fragments in the crypt to tell of the earlier work. Thus the present cathedral is certainly the fourth stone church which has stood on the site.

The history of the archbishops and their jurisdiction is full of interest. Gregory the Great intended Canterbury and York to be co-equal, and each to have twelve subordinate bishops. This division, however, was never made though metropolitan powers were granted to the archbishop of York in 601, the question of precedence with Canterbury being settled by priority of consecration. The ascendancy of Northumbria in the eighth century raised York to a greater position than it had occupied since the departure of the Romans, and its archbishop was again granted independent jurisdiction in 734. But the quarrel with Canterbury continued for another six hundred years, till Innocent the Sixth invented the present titles in the time of Archbishop Thoresby (1352-73).

York has ever been noted for the rebellious character of its citizens, but the minster has miraculously escaped in the many rough doings of the people. The guardianship of Fairfax during the Civil War was particularly fortunate, for his loving care preserved the magnificent glass which is the chief glory of the cathedral and one of the most precious relics of medieval art in existence.

The cathedral, though never part of a monastic establishment, and always served by secular canons, is popularly known as the "minster," by which title it has become endeared to all true lovers of the noble art and ideals of the medieval church.

### FROM THE SOUTH-WEST

**Y**ORK cathedral has two prominent characteristics which have been remarked by nearly every writer—its dignity and its massive grandeur. From no point of view are they better seen than from the south-west. The great central tower, though only two hundred feet high, vies with those of Canterbury, Lincoln, and Gloucester in its splendid solidity, while the west front has been pronounced to be the finest in England, and the nearest approach of our native builders to the great façades of the Continental cathedrals.

The elaborate system of buttresses along the south side of the nave shows clearly that a stone vault was originally planned. This idea must soon have been abandoned, for no similar preparations are found on the north.



YORK CATHEDRAL



FROM THE SOUTH-WEST

### THE NAVE, LOOKING WEST

AS the exterior is noted for its dignity so the interior is remarkable for its spaciousness. The width of the nave and aisles—one hundred and four feet—is unequalled in any Gothic church in England, and produces an effect almost of emptiness which is rather disappointing at first.

In 1291 the original Norman nave was apparently in ruins, for Archbishop John le Romeyn in that year began the present one, probably building outside and over the existing church, and so producing the extraordinary width which made a heavy stone vault impossible.

The wonderful glass which fills the windows was a dominant factor in the design, the maximum of window area combined with immense strength being required. Many high authorities have declared the west window to be the most perfect example of Gothic tracery in the world, though some would maintain that the east window at Carlisle is finer.



YORK CATHEDRAL



THE NAVE, LOOKING WEST

## THE NAVE, LOOKING EAST

IN most English cathedrals the question of the division of the choir from the rest of the church was discussed with much heat during the last century. The result was that in some cases beautiful choir screens were swept away to improve the "vista." Here, fortunately, the screen has been spared, for it is a perfect example of late Perpendicular work. The statues of the Kings of England are original except that of Henry the Sixth, whose place was taken for some time by James the First's.

Above the crossing rises the lantern of the central tower, a worthy crown to the great nave and transepts, with its vault one hundred and eighty feet from the pavement. Very curious and interesting is the way in which the nave aisles have been joined to the transepts. The work is a good example of the engineering skill of the medieval builders.

## THE FIVE SISTERS

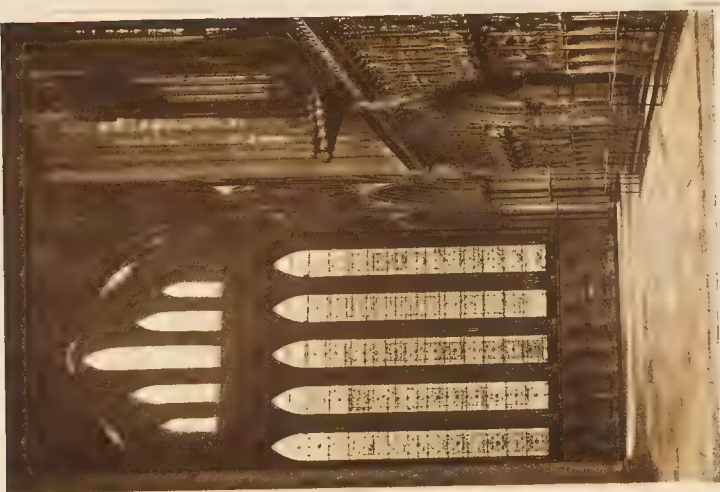
UNTIL Lord Grimthorpe rebuilt the south transept front at St. Alban's cathedral these five graceful lancet windows were the largest in the world. They were built by John le Romeyn, the Treasurer (1241—60), and are filled with fine contemporary glass. Rich as the cathedral is in gorgeous glass of later periods, there is none which has received higher praise than this early work with its subdued tints and simple design.

The whole effect of the great transepts as one enters by the south door is very fine. Their great height and length, together with the double aisles, show the magnificence of Archbishop Grey's plans, and provided later builders with a noble scale for their work.

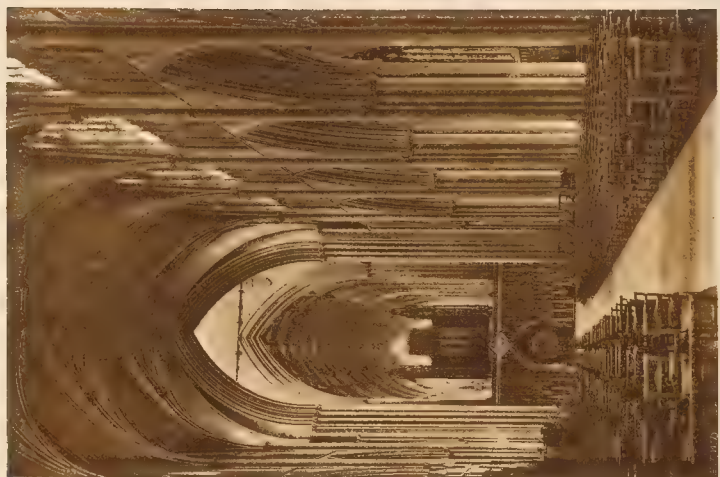
The pious originator of this great scheme is commemorated by a beautiful tomb in the eastern aisle of the south transept.



YORK CATHEDRAL



THE FIVE SISTERS



THE NAVE, LOOKING EAST

## THE CHOIR

THE change of style from Decorated to Perpendicular which took place between the building of the nave and the choir was undoubtedly a change for the better at York. The choir is far more satisfactory than the nave, partly because while not quite so wide it is a little higher, but chiefly because the style used was better adapted to the great scale of the building.

The east end was begun in 1361, and the rebuilding lasted till the end of the century. The treatment of the triforium is a great improvement on the nave, as it adds the depth which is so much missed in the earlier work.

In 1829 a lunatic set fire to the choir, when the wood work was entirely destroyed. The restoration was carried out at immense cost and very thoroughly, an almost exact reproduction of the original work being possible.

Below the choir is the crypt, which has been opened up and found to contain much of Archbishop Roger's work, with some Saxon fragments of uncertain date.





THE CHOIR

## THE CATHEDRAL AND BOOTHAM BAR

THE city of York, with its fine defences and unique series of gateways, provides a worthy setting for its noble minster, the constant change of view as the visitor walks round the walls disclosing many beautiful features of the cathedral which are hardly realized from the Close.

Though there is only a difference of two feet in height between the central and the western towers, the great width of the former balances this and prevents any sense of disproportion. All three were built in the fifteenth century, the central tower first (1400—23), then the western pair (1432—74).

## FROM THE NORTH-EAST

THE east front of York cathedral is at once disappointing and impressive. Disappointing because the whole design is stunted by the very low pitch of the roof; impressive because of the magnitude of its individual parts. The great window which fills the east wall is the largest window in the world, being nearly eighty feet high, and is flanked by enormous buttresses. The panelling which hides the roofs of the choir and aisles gives a very square, severe appearance to the whole front and does not add to its beauty.

Both the eastern transepts are formed merely by raising the aisle roof to the level of that over the choir. Externally the effect is as fine as it is internally, the break in the long line of windows only serving to emphasize the great proportions of the church.



YORK CATHEDRAL



THE CATHEDRAL AND BOOTHAM BAR



FROM THE NORTH-EAST

## THE CHAPTER HOUSE

WHEN this beautiful building was finished its designer placed upon the wall an inscription proclaiming it to be the perfection of his art. Modern restorations may have robbed it of some of its original glory, but it remains a wonderful example of the fourteenth century builder and sculptor at their best.

Here and at Southwell are to be seen the only polygonal chapter houses without a central column to support the vault. At York the builder's courage again failed him and the vault is only wood; at Southwell it is stone. The vestibule was built after the chapter house to join it to the church. It is a work of exceptional beauty, and its windows contain some of the richest glass in the cathedral, mostly Decorated with a few earlier fragments.



YORK CATHEDRAL



THE CHAPTER HOUSE







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